

Crystallizing Thoughts

How do theoretical arguments of the past figure into current conceptions of film as art?

The Seventh Art Debates – French critics find film to be both a medium with its own specificity and a new art form that partakes of the legacy of the earlier fine Arts

The Auteur theory – originally proposed in France, based in the notion of a “camera pen” with which a director “writes” a film. A theory that supports the discourse that creates the film as an individual work of art created by an individual artist.

Current art and independent film culture – continues the legacy from the Seventh Art debates, giving film its own specific criteria for excellence (and its own reward systems, like the prizes given by festivals like Cannes). Also continues the legacy of the auteur theory, valorizing the artist and gaining legitimacy for film as Art by partaking of the discourse on Artists from Michelangelo the painter to Michelangelo Antonioni.

How do discourses about art in general figure into film discourses? i.e. discourses on film reception?

Critics – *see below

Newspapers and Trade Journals – differentiation is made in terms of which publications cover what kind of events. For instance, the regular megaplex-fare movie review is quite a different thing from the foreign art film that shows in only one theater in the city review, which is also quite different from a review by a reviewer who travels to a Festival (although the last two are really linked by habitus). A trade journal like *Variety*, for instance, has a very different take on the movies to cover than does *The New York Post*.

**note – look at the end of this document for some statistics on publications and their coverage of Cannes in 2004*

Who are the key players in the “field?”

The Most Official Gatekeepers – those who plan, program, and decide the Festivals like Cannes, Toronto, Sundance, et al.

The Filmmakers – who partake of this discourse in claiming legitimacy for themselves. Also, these filmmakers are very much in the legacy of young artists who claim a genealogy from already-establish artists. Therefore partaking of a discourse of Art again.

The Critics – Who maintain the system of differentiation based on film’s specificity (to create their own field and livelihood) and its Artistic nature (to ensure their own legitimacy as sophisticated cultural critics with established and fine taste).

What assertions are made by the way that Cannes presents itself on its website, through the use of historical documents like the posters it has ranging from the Festival's inception in the 1940s up through the present? What about its archives?

Major Ways in Which Cannes Self-Presents on the Website:

Press Releases – website's initial page, the first thing the viewer sees and connected to a link that brings the viewer immediately to press releases of the past two years. Marks the Festival as *newsworthy* right away.

As a Legitimated Institution With a History – history and tradition are referenced and used as legitimating discourses in the “Archives” section listed at the top of the navigation bar of the website. Partaking of discourses of tradition that legitimize the Festival as an institution (Bourdieu).

As a Legitimizing Institution With Standards – “Submitting a Film” section for filmmakers lists extensive requirements and standards for a film's submission. Also, the press must be accredited by the Festival. All in keeping with the management of a certain set of standards for the Art world as embodied in the Festival alive. Perpetuating standards and systems by which art products are differentiated according to tradition and its reflection of a sub-culture's habitus (Bourdieu).

The website has many charts that break down numerically the #s of films from a given country, the money aspects of the festival, and the #s of members of the press that attend the Festival. What legitimacy does this practice of chart-making add to the Festival?

This is the economic side of the Festival that aligns it with Hollywood, for one thing. The Cannes Film Festival is a business as well as a cultural event. In this way, it shares another characteristic of that event that it wants to compare itself to: the Olympics. Both provide revenue for sponsors and organizations, and both provide revenue for the companies that showcase products there. Lastly, both provide revenue for the settings in which these festivals take place.

Incidentally, it is also a way to showcase the Internationalism that the Festival champions as a virtue. In this, again, it partakes of that discourse of internationalism that both the Olympics and a style-based film culture share.

What, then, about the setting of Cannes? Why is this significant? Is it?

It is quite significant, and I thank Jennifer for pointing this out to me. Cannes, of course, is a seaside town on the French Riviera. Unlike its neighbors like Nice, Cannes' economy is really based around a single selling point: the Festival. Cannes is quiet for the majority of the year. However, according to Frommers.com, it is also both glitzy and expensive – which leads me to believe that the glamour of the international film festival has rubbed off on property prices.

Thanks to Jennifer for pointing out the discrepancy in my analysis thus far. I have been assuming that Cannes embodies French culture, or an abstract “Frenchness” to the globe without interrogating that concept sufficiently. Here we go with a crash course in my current

thinking: Cannes might not be a town that actually hosts a thriving microcosm of the French economy or of French cultural production, but in its role as the site of this French-sponsored and elite festival, it becomes a site in which the cultural imagination is active. Cannes is not just about what lies within the city's limits (what resorts or businesses) but what lies in the imagination *about* Cannes as this imagination is fueled by images from the Festival and from the films that appear within the Festival.

How does Hollywood fit into this discourse on internationalism? Hollywood is international?

Yes, Hollywood *is* international as a marketing strategy. Hollywood, as the reigning supplier of motion pictures to the world, is the ultimate cultural colonizer. It sells not only an aesthetic but also the products that come along with Hollywood representation. Hollywood is a great example of an American capitalist machine. However, as I began to talk about in class, Hollywood's internationalism is one based on the economy, and Hollywood wields *economic capital* over the film industries of the world.

It has long been the case that European or other foreign national cinemas have set themselves in opposition to Hollywood's economic power by making claims on artistic merit. These small cinemas depend largely on the legitimization of reviewers, critics, and the art world to enable their international success. When this success arrives, it is less frequently calculated in dollars and cents (or the country's currency). Instead, it is measured by a prize that recognizes the artistic qualities of the project. Indeed, these projects bank on their *cultural capital* and this cultural capital is founded on the art film world's participation in discourses on art, very consciously avoiding discourses on money except in the romantic notion of a discourse of impoverishment.

Of course, with the increasing commercialization of Cannes (people wearing those *Shrek 2* ears is one great example) the lines are becoming blurred. Essentially, this amounts to a victory of economic capital over cultural capital. Hollywood is attempting, of course, to use Cannes as a platform for their product. Cannes, as a money-making venture as much as a cultural forum, is willing to do so. Of course, this causes an ideological vibration that makes a purist uncomfortable.

This keys into issues that I can't deal with here, but they include the notion of a historical cycle in which counter-cultural artistic production is sometimes more, sometimes less willing to be sponsored by mainstream capitalist consumer companies.

Who *are* the critics and reviewers who attend the festival? How do they generally respond? What about the Americans specifically? Differences between popular and trade press reviewer responses?

In a LexisNexis search for "Cannes Film Festival" with a limit of the past two years, 125 documents were returned. The types of publications present in the sample range a good bit. From trade journals like *Shoot Magazine* and, of course, *Variety* we find more in-depth pieces about the changing nature of the Festival itself. The February 2004 issue of *Variety* analyzes the Festival's attempts at regaining prestige after the poor news coverage of 2003. It gives a meta-view on the Festival. On the other side of the spectrum, in pieces from publications like the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a local Pittsburgh newspaper, we get just tidbits that relate

to the most mainstream of pop cultural figures that will appear. For instance, February 20, 2004 issue headline: “Tarantino to Head Cannes Fest Jury.” Talk of the movies is downplayed in favor of talk regarding celebrities. This certainly ties into what we have said above about the Americanism of a celebrity consumer tradition that is presents in the discourse on Cannes. Trade journals, much more invested in a discourse of film art and in specific film culture, are more likely to muse on more legitimate subjects.

What is the “news” about Cannes? Is it about the Festival environment itself, the films, or the figures present at the Festival?

This depends entirely on who’s reporting the “news.” If it’s the *Village Voice*, then we get something like what appears on June 1, 2004: an article that is not about a famous person, nor about a famous film, but an article that focuses on Cannes as an artistic institution. It discusses the wins and losses of various films and filmmakers without taking the time to explain who the filmmakers are, what their tradition is, or what previous films contextualize the present ones. That is, it speaks to a reader who presumably already knows these things, and doesn’t take the time to detail them. It is *news* insofar as it updates the knowledgeable reader without further ado. It tells her the little bits that she didn’t know about what happened to her favorite films or directors, or what happened to those she didn’t like. In not providing detail, and hence inherently preaching to the choir, *The Village Voice* rewards us with an expression of our habitus as film fiends. Also worthy of note: during the Festival itself, *Variety* online posts an article on the Festival every two days, if not more often.

Of course, a publication like Ontario’s *Windsor Star* is quite different. Unlike *Variety*, which obviously sees its readership as one that would care to know daily news coming out of Cannes, the *Windsor Star* confines itself to one article. It is about Cannes in terms of pop culture, actually in terms that make it sound much like the Oscars. It focuses not on an artistic discourse of betterment and personal expression, but on the discourse of the red carpet. It’s about glamour, and it’s titled: “Powerful and Beautiful Gather for Cannes Fest.” (May 13, 2004.)

More examples will follow in the paper when completed. However, these two should make it clear that whether Cannes is “news” depends very much on whom you ask. And what habitus they speak from.

How does the festival mark itself as international? What does this say about film discourse, both Hollywood and Art/Independent?

**discussed at length not only above, but in earlier drafts too.*

What about film celebrity and the legitimacy of artistic celebrity? Why are art-film celebrity names so often used in the Festival’s self-presentation?

It’s a method of self-legitimization. By invoking the names of the Art Gods that they have created, institutions like the Festival can then cash in on their legitimacy. It’s actually a sort of cycle of legitimization. Festivals canonize directors, whose cultural capital is created by this canonization. The convenient part is that then the Festivals can name-drop, invoking the cultural capital that they created in these artists as a means of legitimizing the Festival. Two

kinds of legitimization feed off of one another, sustaining a cycle and system that in the end creates a FIELD (Bourdieu).

All put forward and generating small answers to the larger question: How does Cannes exemplify Bourdieu's cultural analysis in *Distinction*, *The Rules of Art*, and *The Field of Cultural Production*?

Well, you'll have to read the finished paper to find that out!